

Message Text

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ACTION SCI-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 ACDA-19 CIAE-00 INR-10 IO-14

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 RSC-01 FEA-02 EB-11 TRSE-00 OMB-01

SS-20 NSF-04 DODE-00 PA-04 USIA-15 PRS-01 SPC-03 PM-07

DRC-01 /158 W

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R 241426Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7353

INFO USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USDOC WASHDC

USAEC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 01068

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, TECH, UK

SUBJECT: UKAEA CHAIRMAN TESTIFIES ON PENDING NUCLEAR
POWER DECISION

REF: LONDON'S 994

1. UKAEA CHAIRMAN SIR JOHN HILL TESTIFIED FOR TWO HOURS JANUARY 23 BEFORE THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ENERGY RESOURCES SUB-COMMITTEE, CHAIRED BY ARTHUR PALMER, OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY. THE GIST OF HIS INVARIABLY GUARDED AND SOMETIMES ALMOST EVASIVE REMARKS FOLLOWS.

2. WHILE REFUSING TO CONTRADICT EXPLICITLY THE TESTIMONY OF PREVIOUS HMG FIGURES ON FUTURE REACTOR NEEDS (REFTEL), HILL CAME DOWN HEAVILY ON PRESERVING OPTIONS AND FURTHERING U.K. TECHNOLOGY. IN EFFECT, HE HAD NO OBJECTION TO THE PURCHASE BY THE CEGB OF ONE OR TWO LIGHT WATER REACTORS DURING THE NEXT FEW YEARS. HILL STATED THAT THE ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE AT THE END OF THAT PERIOD SHOULD BE INVESTIGATED AND SEEMED TO HOLD

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OUT THE HOPE THAT THE NEXT GENERATION OF BRITISH GAS-

COOLED HIGH TEMPERATURE REACTORS MIGHT WELL PROVE THEN TO BE MOST SUITABLE FOR BRITAIN'S NEEDS. HE SAID A REACTOR PLANT USING THAT U.K. TECHNOLOGY SHOULD ALSO BE STARTED SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THE "FILL-IN" LWR'S. HILL STRESSED THE OPINION THAT THE COUNTRY SHOULD NOT BE LOCKED INTO RELIANCE ON ONE DESIGN SYSTEM, ESPECIALLY SINCE WESTINGHOUSE'S PWR'S OF THE SIZE CONTEMPLATED ARE NOT OPERATIONALLY PROVEN AS YET. RATHER, STARTING CONSTRUCTION OF EACH STATION OF A GIVEN DESIGN SHOULD BE SEPARATED FROM THE NEXT START BY ABOUT TWO YEARS TO PERMIT LEARNING WHAT PROBLEMS NEED TO BE OVERCOME. THIS SHOULD BE DONE, HE SAID, IN THE CASE OF U.K. GAS-COOLED REACTORS, AS WELL.

3. HILL HAD NO COMMENT TO OFFER ON BALANCE OF PAYMENTS QUESTIONS. ONE MP POINTEDLY OBSERVED THAT A DECISION TO BUY ONLY ONE OR TWO LWR'S WOULD ALTER RADICALLY THE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS POSITION RELATED TO LWR'S AS PRESENTED BY EARLIER WITNESSES. (NATIONAL NUCLEAR CORPORATION CHAIRMAN LORD ALDINGTON EARLIER TESTIFIED THAT BALANCE OF PAYMENTS LOSSES WOULD BE MINIMAL AFTER AN INITIAL "DOWN PAYMENT" FOR LWR TECHNOLOGY, I.E., AFTER PURCHASE OF THE FIRST FEW REACTORS).

4. SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS AS AN ARGUMENT AGAINST LWR'S CAME IN FOR CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION BY THE SUB-COMMITTEE. HILL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE INTEGRITY OF PRESSURE VESSELS IS A QUESTION APPLYING TO LWR'S AND NOT TO OTHER SYSTEMS NOW AVAILABLE. HE STRONGLY SUPPORTED NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS INSPECTORATE CHIEF WILLIAMS' CONTENTION THAT HE (WILLIAMS) MUST BE FULLY SATISFIED ON SAFETY BEFORE LICENSING ANY STATION, ALTHOUGH HE NOTED THAT THE TIME REQUIRED FOR SUCH AN EXERCISE WITH RESPECT TO LWR'S

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WOULD NOT NECESSARILY TAKE TWO YEARS AS WILLIAMS HAD EARLIER INDICATED. SUB-COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN PALMER REMARKED THAT A REPORT RECEIVED FROM CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR TO HMG SIR ALAN COTTRELL NOTED THE NEED FOR FURTHER STUDY OF SMALL CRACKS IN LWR PRESSURE VESSELS AND OF THE THERMAL EFFECT OF THE LOSS OF COOLANTS IN LWR SYSTEMS.

5. PALMER ANNOUNCED DURING THE SESSION THAT THE SUB-COMMITTEE THAT DAY WAS BEGINNING TO DRAFT ITS REPORT IN VIEW OF THE URGENCY OF A DECISION WITHIN HMG, BUT THAT THE GROUP NEVERTHELESS EXPECTED TO HEAR SOON FROM LORD CARRINGTON, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY.

6. COMMENT: THE MOOD OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE SEEMED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER IN ATTENDANCE TO BE DECIDEDLY OPPOSED TO THE POSITION ADOPTED BY THE CEGB AND NNC. THIS MAY HAVE BEEN DUE TO THE NATURE OF THE QUESTIONING SESSION TO SOME EXTENT, BUT IT POSSIBLY REFLECTS AS WELL A BROADER-BASED RESISTANCE WITHIN HMG TO ANY WHOLESALE IMPORTATION OF U.S. TECHNOLOGY WITH THE ASSOCIATED WRITE-OFF OF U.K. NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT EXCEPT OVER THE LONG TERM.
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